

**This document is a compilation of Letters from the many friends and family who were willing to share their wonderful memories and stories about the late Victor Ortiz**

**-Eulogy from John Boutin**

“Good morning,

All of us here wish to express our sincere condolences to you Joann, Manny, and the rest of Victor’s family. Last night was a wonderful tribute to a Brockton legend. He will not soon be forgotten.

My name is John Boutin and I am a friend of Victor. He asked me to give his eulogy and I am honored to do so. I will do my best to share a snapshot of his life. I’m not going to talk about his coaching records or awards won. You’re probably already aware of those. I want to share with you the man that I knew. Please bear with me as this will not be easy.

I have known Victor for 45 years. We met playing volleyball in a Brockton teacher’s league. At the time he was the boy’s freshman basketball coach at BHS and I was the varsity coach at Canton HS. After a volleyball game, we went out for a quick beer and that was the beginning of a long and cherished friendship. When I was named the BHS basketball coach he was my first choice to be my assistant. I could not have chosen better. His experience and love of basketball were evident but helping Brockton kids was what Victor was all about.

Victor Ortiz was a giver. This began when he joined the Navy right out of high school. He gave 4 years to his country in Vietnam, on the Constitution in Boston Harbor, and the Newport Naval Academy where, as part of his duties, he played basketball for the Academy. After his tour of duty, he entered Stonehill College to further his education and to play basketball but blew his knee out as a freshman. Because he was older than the Stonehill varsity players, he was asked to volunteer to coach basketball at Stonehill while finishing his schooling. Once again, continuing to give to help others.

Hired as a guidance counselor in the Brockton Schools, Victor helped hundreds if not thousands of students across the city with issues that would arise. But not just during school hours. This was a 24-hour-a-day/ 7 days-a-week/ 365 days-a-year sort of position. He would tell me stories of getting calls during the night or on weekends and going out to help a student, player, or their families, oftentimes paying out of his own pocket. He would find the programs and services the families would need to get them back on their feet so the kids could get back to school. This giving to others continued throughout his entire counseling and coaching career.

Victor loved to golf. Victor loved “his kids” whether students or players. Victor loved to cook. Victor loved to bash Donald Trump. But more than anything else, he loved Joann. It was in the Brockton Schools that he met, courted, and married Joann, the love of his life. Joann, another incredibly giving person (you know she worked in the Peace Corps), understood Victor’s need to give of his time, talents, and treasure and was very accepting of these virtues. We all have come to know her as Saint Joann. In my presence they had a Honeymooners TV show relationship: he was Ralph Kramden, the bus driver who knew it all, picking on her incessantly but always with a smile, and she was Alice, rolling her eyes and smirking at me as she would leave the room to do his bidding. And yet, every time I would stop by to visit and she was not in earshot, Victor would share with me how caring and loving she was and how lucky he was. From his perspective, they were a perfect match. By her actions, there is no doubt Joann felt the same way.

Victor enjoyed some of the finer things in life. Before he got sick he would enjoy an occasional fine cigar, dining at high-end Boston restaurants (his favorite was Capital Grill), and driving top-of-the-line Volvo’s.

Other than scratch tickets, his greatest vice was buying Brooks Brothers clothing. They knew that if they sent him a \$50 gift card, he would buy a \$350 sweater and rave about having gotten it for \$50 off. He had Brooks Brothers clothing for every occasion in every color. I recently asked him how many 3-button polo shirts he owned and he told me 24. Many still have the tags on them. I often asked when the addition was being put onto the house for his closet. Joann would say he was the best-dressed guy at dialysis and on the couch at 10 Fern Circle.

Victor and my relationship grew over the years and he and Joann became part of my family. He dressed as Santa for my nieces and nephews and I have pictures of my mother sitting on Santa's lap. Mom thought the world of Victor. He and Joann would come by occasionally for Thanksgiving, Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, and Easter. Both Joann and Victor worked with Phyllis Riordan, my wife's sister and someone he truly admired, so there was a comfort level when the families would get together.

Our friendship continued to grow as he took over coaching the Boxers when my career path changed and I was one of his biggest fans. He was not only a fabulous basketball coach but also a father figure for many of his players. Victor learned from his father and his time in the Navy that discipline was an important part of a young man's life. As a coach, he was a disciplinarian but this was what a lot of young Brockton men needed. He knew when to be tough and when to be caring. Again, here is Victor giving a little of his experience and talent to nurture adolescents into men.

Victor never forgot a single player who played for him and would quickly recite the player's attributes even if the player had graduated 30 years ago. Yes, this ability might have extended phone conversations but that was part of the package that was Victor Ortiz. He managed to keep in touch with many of his players and coaches and if you were getting calls from him, it was because he cared. You were part of his family.

We talked basketball and life all the time. He became a confidant of mine and his guidance background plus knowing me as well as he did helped get me through difficult times in my life, especially the deaths of my mother and brother. Vic and I got our team back together again as we both approached retirement. He was still coaching his Boxers and I was appointed the BHS Athletic Director. During the basketball season he would stop by my office nearly every afternoon before practice or to give me a rundown on how he thought the game would go that night, whether home or away. He gave me his time and talent and made me feel like a valued member of his coaching staff. He gave back to me something that I loved but lost: coaching. He knew me well.

Since his kidney and liver transplants, his social life had to be curtailed due to the compromising of his immune system. Nonetheless, I would drop by to see him at his home and we would sit across the room from one another. I would share issues I might be having with my crazy brother and he would always have a solid suggestion on how to deal with it. I knew he would always keep our conversations confidential. This was what friends did and I always knew I could count on him. Victor also kept a well-stocked liquor cabinet in the event I needed to calm down before venting. Now that's a buddy.

After Victor learned his transplanted kidney failed in 2015, he went on dialysis but was always confident that a new kidney would be found. His attitude remained upbeat year after year as the dialysis slowly sapped him of his health. Still, he would talk about the future and all that he still wanted to accomplish. How did he do that? He did it because he was always goal-oriented. A lesser man would have said that he had enough a long time ago. Not Victor Ortiz. He would talk about golfing again, swimming again, traveling back to Spain and Puerto Rico again. Only recently had he given his golf clubs away. Only after they removed his toes did he say he would never see San Juan again because he could not walk on the cobblestone streets. Yet, it still never sapped him of his will to live. Don't raise your hands but how many of you received an email from Vic with something trying to make you smile or upbeat music to start your

day? These messages were usually sent while he was undergoing dialysis. With all that was on his plate, he was trying to boost your morale. Always giving.

Once Victor came home from Beth Israel for the final time there were calls from his doctors and nurses extolling the love and respect they had for him. Being in and out of there for 14 years, they said he was always compliant, never complained, and dealt valiantly even when in obvious pain. The medical staff shared that rather than saying “Why me”, Victor focused on the positive that one day he would get another kidney. This is the Coach Ortiz attitude.

In closing, Victor’s strength and courage in the face of all he had to endure have been an inspiration for us all. He is a champion to be admired for his will to live, matched only by his desire to help his students, players, coaches, friends, and community. In spite of the hardships placed before him, Victor Ortiz was given a life to be lived and he unselfishly used it to give to others.

Goodbye, my dear and trusted friend. Say hello to Ed Kelly and Steve Whitaker for me, please. Rest in Peace until we meet again.”

### **Steve Melnick, Class of 1990**

“The first time I met Coach Ortiz, I was in a how-to-study class at Brockton High School. I was sitting in class and Coach Columbo, the football coach, came in and asked if he could talk to me in the hallway. At this point, I had no idea what was going on. In the hallway, he introduced me to Coach Ortiz, the head basketball coach at Brockton High. We talked and it was the end of my freshman year, he said that next year he wanted me to come to tryouts for the team and come to his basketball camp at the High School. I said sure, but the reality that my mom couldn't get me there or really afford the camp made it impossible.

Fast forward to tryouts the next year. I went out the first day and I was terrible compared to everyone else. So, I went home and decided there was no way I would make the team, so I decided to stay home the next day. The next day about 4:30ish our home phone rang and I answered it, it was Coach Ortiz wondering where I was. I explained to him I was terrible. I can't help your team and there were so many better players to choose from. He said he didn't care that it was his job to make me better and that he saw something that I didn't see in myself. He finished up by saying I will see you tomorrow at practice, I said yes sir!!

I spent the next 3 years playing on the Brockton High School basketball team, I know some days I was frustrated, and some days he was since our personalities were so opposite. But he always looked out for me, he helped me get my first job at the camp at the high school over the summer under his friend Mr. Boutin. But even more, he gave me something more valuable, he took a kid from a single-parent family, who was struggling with confidence and how I fit in, and gave him a family of teammates around him, something to work for, and confidence that if I put my mind towards something I could achieve it. Looking back, he was right about me, and we always talked a couple of times a year about it and how proud he was of me and of what all his players accomplished after high school. For Coach Ortiz it wasn't all about the win-loss record it was how he could make a difference in an individual's life, and for that, he will always be thankful and be remembered by me”

### **Kathy Smith**

“As a new teacher in the Brockton Public Schools, I had the good fortune of meeting Victor Ortiz. I had been appointed the Varsity Cheerleading Coach for Brockton High School and Vic was the JV Basketball

Coach under Coach John Boutin. Vic always found time to check in with me and my group of cheerleaders. He always made sure to praise the girls telling them how important their cheering was in motivating the team and fans. Many times, when we traveled to other schools, Vic could be found making sure I was supported in getting my group to and from those away games. We later became close colleagues and friends during my time as a teacher at East Junior High when Vic was the Adjustment Counselor for my Spanish-speaking students. He always went the extra mile for my students and their families.

My favorite story about my time with Vic was during a summer golf outing at Ridder Country Club with Vic, JoAnn, and my husband Gerry. The golf was followed by a homemade dinner at Vic and JoAnn's where Vic prepared his famous Bouillabaisse. We were all enjoying our delicious meal when JoAnn suddenly noticed their beloved dog Gretchen running into the dining room with pieces of a \$20 bill in her mouth. Gretchen kept leaving the room and coming back with another \$20 bill in her mouth. Not knowing where the stash was coming from, I finally left the table and found my pocketbook on the floor with \$20 bills missing from the bag! Vic laughed out loud and enjoyed this story for many years, especially when we would visit Fern Ave. He always reminded me to place my pocketbook in a safe place.

I will forever miss my friend, colleague, and fellow coach Vic Ortiz. I feel blessed to have known Vic and am proud to have called him my friend. I will always cherish these memories and so many more. Rest in peace Vic and go on Eagles Wings."

### **Elena Bergeron**

"I met Victor while moving into "the Sem" during my senior year at Stonehill College. He offered to help my dad move my big trunk full of "stuff." There began a friendship which covered over 50 years! Victor became my "big brother" and always called me "Lamb Chop." Fifteen years later he introduced me to my husband Charlie, and later became Godfather to my son Jonathan. Victor and JoAnn were family. We got together every New Year's Day for 35 years! We also gathered for many birthdays, family events, cookouts, and pool days at my parent's house in Brockton. When Victor could not come, JoAnn would always be there! Truly "The Good Old Days!" I will always remember Victor's wonderful laugh and all the love he gave us. He will be forever missed."

### **Greg Dickinson**

"I had the privilege to grow up next door to Victor and although I didn't play basketball he was still my coach "off the court" starting from age six. Victor gave me guidance through my youth and also during my adulthood as we became lifelong friends. He was always not telling me what to do but as a coach always offering his advice on the predicaments life throws at you. He definitely impacted my growing up for the better.

Victor scripted my wedding in Canada to propose to my wife who is a serious Canadiens fan. This included visiting the parents of the future bride to ask her father for permission, getting down on one knee in the lobby of her work, and proposing while presenting a ring! Of course, this was difficult for both of us being Bruins fans! Victor and JoAnn attended our wedding and two kids later we are still married. Worked perfectly, Victor! I will truly miss our friendship, conversations, and calling him on Father's days as he was like a second dad to me."

### **Raynham Martial Arts Academy**

“Victor set my parents up back in the 80s. He went to college with my mum and worked with my dad, and introduced them to one another... at a Brockton High School basketball game. Of course. My parents named him my Godfather, and I've always referred to him as Uncle Victor. That'd be more than enough to thank him for (the opportunity to exist, I mean), but Victor continued to have a significant influence on me throughout my whole life.

Victor introduced me to the Spanish language--from a young age, I thought it was super cool that he was bilingual, and I enjoyed speaking Spanish with him so much that I ultimately pursued it in college and earned a Bachelor of Arts. The ability to speak Spanish has helped me a lot in my career, y pienso en él cada vez que lo hablo. He also bought me my very first Power Rangers toy, which introduced me to the franchise, and karate and martial arts. Almost thirty years later, I have been running a martial arts school for nearly a decade... still imagining myself to be the Green Ranger.

Victor's influence is interwoven into two of the most important parts of who I am; he really set me up to succeed, just like he did for so many others, and I am immensely grateful to have known him my whole life. Always available for a (long) phone call, always ready with sound advice and comforting words.

In closing, I'd just like to share a silly little thing. I know that when most people think of God they think of an old man in a white robe, long white beard... You know. Well, Victor's my godfather, and to this day, whenever someone is talking about God, I can't help but imagine him to be a jubilant, balding Puerto Rican man wearing glasses and a Brooks Brothers t-shirt.

Thanks, Vic!”

### **Mike McGillis**

“Victor was a very special coach for me. In my freshman year at Brockton, I was cut from the freshman basketball team. It was very disappointing to me, but I decided that I was going to work to get better at basketball (I was small, very raw, and had very little experience playing organized basketball), as I enjoyed basketball more than football. Vic started coaching at BHS during my sophomore year. I grew a lot between my freshman and sophomore years and felt like I had a small chance of making the sophomore/JV team when tryouts started. Fortunately, Victor and Jack Lehane saw something and put me on the sophomore team to start the season. Victor's practices were demanding and intense, but I loved it. He had a way of motivating me to learn more about the game, put forth maximum effort and focus, and do the little things that win basketball games that go unnoticed in the box score. He was tough but fair, knowledgeable, and fun. Little did I know then that Victor was teaching me lifelong lessons on how to be a leader, work as and build a team, compete, and grind when the going got tough, among many other attributes.

I learned and improved so much that I was starting on the JV team by midyear and promoted to the varsity team by the end of my sophomore year. I worked really hard to progress that much, but I give Vic much of the credit for being such a great teacher and coach and giving me a chance. In my senior year, I was elected team captain during John Boutin's first year as varsity basketball coach at Brockton. It was an incredible honor and along with captaining the baseball team, I have great memories of representing Brockton High in those sports. As Victor would always remind me and my teammates, we were Boxers for life!

Back in those days, Victor used to offer a steak dinner at a Brockton steakhouse (I think it was LePages on Pleasant Street) for anyone on the team who drew 5 or more offensive fouls in a game. I would regularly draw that many in a game, and Victor would always remind me how many steak dinners he owed me. We never did get a chance to get out for those steak dinners. I regret never finding the time to do that but maybe there's a table set in heaven for us (where I know Victor is, and hopefully I'll get there!). I am proud to say I played on Victor's first team when he arrived at BHS. Although I couldn't have predicted the incredible success he had at BHS, there was clearly something special about him and how he connected with his players

I would see Vic occasionally while I was in college (first at UNH and the Northeastern), and attended as many BHS basketball games as I could, but the demands of a rigorous academic schedule, playing college baseball, and then entering the business world, getting married, having children, relocating to Northern Virginia, gave me very little time stay super connected with Victor and the BHS sports programs. However, I was always following the BHS basketball team and the other BHS athletic teams and rooting for them and Victor.

I don't recall how I heard about Victor's illness (it may have been through John Boutin or the Boen family) but I was sad to hear about it. I am glad I was able to reconnect with him during that time, relive the old days, and watch replays of the 1985 EMass championship game against Cambridge R&L (which I attended, as well as the state championship game against Fitchburg at the Worcester Centrum). I think we watched the replay of that game 2 or 3 times, with Victor providing commentary for every critical moment of the game. I challenge anyone to find a better high school basketball game in Massachusetts history.

The last few times I saw Victor he was very weak from years of fighting his illness, and probably in much more pain than he would let on. He was a grinder, which is why he was so beloved in Brockton, a city of grinders. Despite what he was going through, he remained very positive that someday he'd recover and be able to get on the golf course again with some of his former players. We spent a lot of time reminiscing about those early BHS teams, some of the players on those teams, what they were doing these days, etc. He would apologize for being so tough on us in those days, but I would tell him that he made us all better players and better people by knowing how to push us hard, but still showing that he cared about us as people more than as basketball players. He would tell me how fortunate he had been in life to find his way to BHS, develop friendships with Jack Lehane and John Boutin, to meet you JoAnn, to get to meet so many players and their families. I would just remind him of the positive influence he had on so many people over the years, and that he should be incredibly proud of that.

RIP Victor. You lived a great life! I love you coach!"

### **Denise Lee**

"Victor always extended a genial invitation to his home. He and JoAnn served as the perfect hosts anytime they invited people to their house, whether it be for a short visit and a light refreshment or a full (and always delicious!) meal. Victor's famous paella was always a treat to be savored; he had his recipe down to an exact science, from the prep to when each ingredient should be added to his masterpiece. And there was ALWAYS a story or two that Victor would share before, during, and after dinner ~ a part of Victor's charm. I treasure these and other fond memories of my valued friendship with Victor and JoAnn."